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Op Ed — Opinions and Editorials

A Cup of Joe, a Krispy Kreme & Thou: Visits to Coffeehouses in Libraries

by **John Riley** (Sales Director, Eastern Book Company) <jdriley@attbi.com>

"A cup of coffee dissolves your drowsiness, sharpens your wit, stimulates your mind and loosens your tongue." — Dr. S. Radakrishnan

"Knowledge is ecstatic in enjoyment, perennial in frame, unlimited in space and indefinite in duration." — De Witt Clinton

Put the two together and you get . . . coffee bars and cafés in libraries! One of the new-found pleasures of working as a salesperson to academic libraries is the recent trend of libraries that are opening cafés in the heart of their buildings. It makes for a quick stop for refreshment or even for a meeting. The coffee in these new cafés sure beats the stuff they had in my college library. We had a vending machine that dispensed a pathetic brew with coffee "whitener" in an antiseptic room with a few plastic chairs and a buzzing fluorescent light fixture. Forget about taking any of it with you to study either.

With the advent of good coffee in America (now even in gas stations!) things are changing for the better. Bookstores have long known the attraction that coffee holds for readers, and public libraries have also found that cafés help create a welcoming atmosphere and help generate revenue as well. Academic libraries have been late to the table, but more and more are opening cafés, especially with a spate of new library construction and renovations and the development of "information commons."

Great stops can be found at the **University of Virginia**, where the coffee bar sits right in the middle of the reference and circulation hall. **Brown University** finds that a small coffee cart in the entryway is a great way to welcome visitors. **USC** has "Trojan Grounds," a café adjacent to Leavey Library that stays open late. **UC Berkeley** has "The Mario Savio Free Speech Coffeehouse" at the entrance to the Moffitt Library. Sleak spots in renovated and new facilities can be found at **University of Scranton**, **University of Rhode Island** and **Dartmouth College**. **University of Kentucky** has a full service café. The Ekstrom Library at **University of Louisville** has been running the profit making coffeebar "Ritazza" since 1997. And **Sonoma State's** Jean and Charles Schulz Library has a great café named, appropriately, "Charlie Brown's" adja-

cent to the entrance where you can get fresh juice and smoothies in addition to coffee and food. **Northeastern University** in Boston added a café when they remodeled their library. They even allow students to bring food and drinks into the stacks when they go to study (a growing trend in academic libraries). Paradoxically, the café has led to less food in the stacks since students like to study in the café and adjoining 24 hour study room.

One of the most interesting cafés is at the **Rochester Institute of Technology**, where a coffeehouse by the name of "Java Wally's" (www.wally.rit.edu/javawally) offers coffee, food, live music, informal lectures, student-produced presentations and poetry slams.

Magazines, newspapers, books and board games are all available. Nothing like some coffee and blitz chess to relax between classes or studying! **RIT** looked at various choices of management for the café and rejected **Starbuck's** in favor of a local café that was happy to work with the college to create a space that would be both comfortable and creative. **Mike Calabrese**, proprietor of two other shops in town worked closely with the library director, **Patricia Pitkin**, to make it a friendly environment in which to relax, work, or meet with friends. Ms. Pitkin says that she sees the café "as another iteration of the library and its 'traditional' functions, to bring people together to learn and interact with information in its many forms." She goes on to say that, "We see the café as an integral part of the library and as a 'welcome mat,' a friendly invitation to encourage patrons to take advantage of the many other services we have developed for their benefit. We view our library as a cross-

roads on campus, a place many visit with regularity." She further notes that "there has been an increase in both circulation and head counts (that) can be directly attributed to the presence of the café; we had seen declines in use before the café."

There is a telling article by **Scott Carlson** in the November 16, 2001 issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled "The Deserted Library." The gist of the article is that with the advent of online resources fewer students are visiting the library. To quote the article, "At the **University of Idaho** at Moscow, for example, door counts and book circulation have decreased by more than 20 percent since 1997, and reserve loans have plummeted by more than 60 percent. But since 1999, the number of electronic articles that Idaho students retrieved went up by about 350 percent, and periodical database searches shot up by almost 800 percent."

But as **Mark Herring**, Dean of Library Services at **Winthrop University**, notes in his article "10 Reasons Why the Internet is No Substitute for a Library," "only 6 percent of academic journals are available online." As for books the number may be closer to .001%.



William Sullivan, a senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, says in **Carlson's** article that "thinking of the library as an information center is the first step toward losing it. The library is more than merely a tool or a warehouse for data." At **Texas Christian University**, **Robert Seal**, the Director of the Library, sought to increase library traffic by opening a café after he visited a busy **Border's** bookstore one Friday night and subsequently read "What If You Ran Your Library Like a Bookstore" in *American Libraries*. He says, "It sort of fits in with my philosophy of doing what the users want, not what the librarians want." There haven't been any food problems yet, since he "con-

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from the start. I am part of a movement that advocates free access to scientific articles. I believe that there is a need for a central repository and that **PubMed Central**, which is such a repository, is doing a good and important job.

ATG: *What is your view of the changing relationship between libraries, publishers and scientists?*

VT: Most science publishers have historically been very close to libraries as the result of an "unspoken conspiracy" where the needs of libraries combined with the opportunities of publishers have resulted in what is now considered to be an unjustified exploitation of the science community – by science publishers. Publishers did it for revenues. Libraries did it to attract good researchers to their institution, given that the level of an institution is judged by the size of its hold-

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ferred with housekeeping staff about the café and worked out a menu that would avoid crumbly foods or dark food dyes, which could stain the furniture." **Mr. Seal** reported that visits to the library increased from about 8,500 a week in 1997 to more than 17,000 per week in 2001, even though books checked out decreased in the same time period.

Further in the article **Samuel Demas**, College Librarian at **Carleton College** calls (cafés in libraries) "co-location" and says other universities are doing similar things in tutoring centers and writing centers — "a sort of one-stop shopping experience, academic style." He concludes by saying "I think the (library) is still going to be a lively place — only as long as people still need community. As soon as that characteristic in the population declines, then libraries will decline."

The creation of "information commons" is a growing trend in libraries, a wired, user friendly space that in conjunction with teaching and reference, and appropriate architecture and facilities (with or without coffee bars) can truly make a part of the library a comfortable and active center for "collaborative learning" and study, while preserving more traditional quiet study areas. And coffeehouses, cafés, and coffee bars may not be a panacea for declining door counts and circulation, but they are a great place to sit, sip a cup of coffee and try to think of one. ☕

ings. At the same time, scientists were prepared to give the publishers everything in order to get their work published and visible. In this way publishers developed a monopoly structure. If a paper was published in a certain journal you couldn't get it from anywhere else. Libraries had a need to acquire the information, so the subscription prices kept increasing. But with the arrival of the Web, the structure of this relationship has been altered dramatically. Suddenly a scientist can type his/her own paper and make it visible and free for the whole world to see on the Web. There is no need for libraries to buy multiple print copies of the same publication. Indeed, the whole process has been turned on its head. Currently science publishers do not provide services that can remotely justify their charges. Librarians are now in the front lines of these changes.

ATG: *What do your ventures have to do with the future of libraries and publishing in the 21st century?*

VT: We see librarians as our natural partners in our current plans. There are many aspects of publishing that cannot be efficiently achieved in the future without working with libraries. In this new electronic world, institutions and libraries are much more central to the dissemination of information. The electronic delivery of information is complex and needs to be co-ordinated. You are looking at a completely different set of services that all need to work in conjunction with each other. The library has become a super-structure for the delivery of online information. Scientists are using increasingly large amounts of data and they need to express their needs and desires to the librarian. It is easier for librarians to look at the statistics of what is being used in the library, to canvas views of library users and to make informed decisions. Librarians have a stronger, more enhanced role that is not just about buying information but about building structures for its delivery and training users. Our publishing activities are aimed at reflecting this new way of thinking and behaving.

ATG: *What is Faculty 1000? What has been the reaction from libraries to this product to date?*

VT: **Faculty 1000** is part of the **BioMedCentral** publishing programme. It is a new online research tool that highlights the most interesting papers in biology, based on recommendations of over 1400 leading scientists. Faculty members are asked to evaluate and comment on 2-4 of the most interesting papers they read each month. The comments for each paper are individually attributed, but its

F1000 factor ("recommended," "must read" and "exceptional") is consensual and incorporates both the ratings it receives and the number of times it is selected by different faculty members. We believe that it is much more rational to judge papers individually than to judge them on the impact factor of the journal in which they are published. **Faculty 1000** is a subscription product and was launched in December. I have never published anything that has received such an enthusiastic response.

ATG: *ImagesMD and PraxisMD are aimed more at the medical community than life science research. Can you tell me more about these products?*

VT: **ImagesMD** is a collection of 40,000 images in clinical medicine. Each image is carefully annotated and searchable. Subscribers can create their own image library, edit text and incorporate them into **Power Point** presentations. **PraxisMD** is very different and is not part of **BioMed Central**. It is a highly ambitious project. The objective of **PraxisMD** is that we believe there is a need for a high quality reference to current practise in medicine. It is designed to be a useful tool to both the patient and physician at the point of care. It is continually updated.

ATG: *Everyone who works or who has worked with you comments that you have a very unusual management style. How would you describe it?*

VT: I see my job as being the one to come up with ideas or to encourage other people to generate ideas. I never look at spreadsheets and wouldn't know how to interpret a balance sheet. I push people very hard. I get very involved, perhaps too involved with projects for a short period of time. I disturb the people working on them and then get interested in something else. We encourage a culture of experimentation. We do not punish people for making mistakes. Lots of things happen that makes my hair stand on end, but everyone carries on regardless! After all, their chances of getting something right are as good as mine.

ATG: *What are your hobbies? What do you do in your spare time?*

VT: I never take holidays. I find work too interesting. I once took a year off in between companies and made a movie, and another year (some years later) built my house in London. I travel quite a bit to the various **Current Science Group Offices** — in Philadelphia, New York and Japan. I enjoy classical music and go to a concert three or four times a week. I mostly read non fiction. ☕